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ABSTRACT

The Internet has become an indispensable medium of the 21st century. Millions of people are using the Internet for exchanging information, surfing for information on virtually any topic, communicating all over the world, participating in discussion groups, shopping, traveling, and many other online activities. The World Wide Web is constantly growing. The Internet offers comprehensive information, instant transactions, communications, and entertainment. The Internet can be used to access reference information, such as news, weather, sports, stock quotes, movie reviews, encyclopedias, airline fares, and to conduct transactions such as trading stocks, making travel reservations, and banking and shopping online. As an educational tool, the Internet can provide users with the opportunity to learn virtually anything. Although the World Wide Web can be an environment of fascinating and colorful information for students, there are many dangers that children should avoid, such as sexual, hateful, or violent materials. This paper is a literature review on Internet safety strategies. The purpose of this paper is to provide parents and teachers some common Internet safety strategies so that they can protect children from the harms of the Internet. (Author)

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ED 470 130

Safety Strategies While Surfing Online in the Classroom

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Abstract*

Apparently, the Internet has become an indispensable medium of the 21st century. Millions of people are using the Internet for exchanging information, surfing on virtually any topic, communicating with the world, participating in discussion groups, shopping, traveling, and doing many other online activities. The World Wide Web is constantly growing. The Internet offers comprehensive information, instant transactions, communications, and entertainment. The Internet can be used to access reference information such as news, weather, sports, stock quotes, movie reviews, encyclopedias, airline fares, and conducted transactions such as trading stocks, making travel reservations, and banking and shopping online. As an educational tool users have the opportunity to learn virtually anything. Although the World Wide Web can be a world of fascinating and colorful information for students, there are many dangers that children should to avoid, such as sexual, hateful, or violent materials. This paper is a literature review on the Internet safety strategies. The purpose of this paper is to provide parents and teachers some common Internet safety strategies so that they can protect children from the harms of the Internet, based on the literature.

(*) An initial draft of this paper was submitted as a part of the requirements of the course, EME 5207: Designing Technology Rich Curricula, offered by Asst. Prof. Colleen Swain in the College of Education at The University of Florida in Spring 2001.

What is the Internet?

The Internet is a network that connects some hundred millions of users from all over the World. It is a place where not only adults but also children have access to and can interact with a wide range of people. Although the Internet has been in existence for 15 years, the number of the Internet users has reached 127 million and has constantly been growing as seen in figure 1 (Shelly, Cahsman, Gunter, 1999). The Internet is commonly being used for exchanging information, making search in various topics, communicating with the world, and participating in discussion groups, shopping, entertaining, traveling and doing many other online activities. Experience of children with the Internet can be fascinating, colorful, fruitful, and enjoyable. However, there are also sites on the Internet that are inappropriate and uncomfortable for a young audience. Thus, great care should be taken while providing children access with the Internet. School is the most popular access point, with more than 80% of youths between ages 10 and 17 saying they surf the Net at school, according to a joint study by the Kaiser Family Foundation and National Public Radio (figure 2). Almost 63% of U.S. public-school classrooms had Internet access by the end of the year 1999, up from just 14 % in 1996, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. Once they are online, children are may be hooked for hours. Among those who use the Internet, 70% of the students say that they use the Web at least once a week at home or school and 35% report using the Net almost every day. On the average, they spent almost 7 hours per month on the Internet - three hours less than adults (Lake, D.2001).

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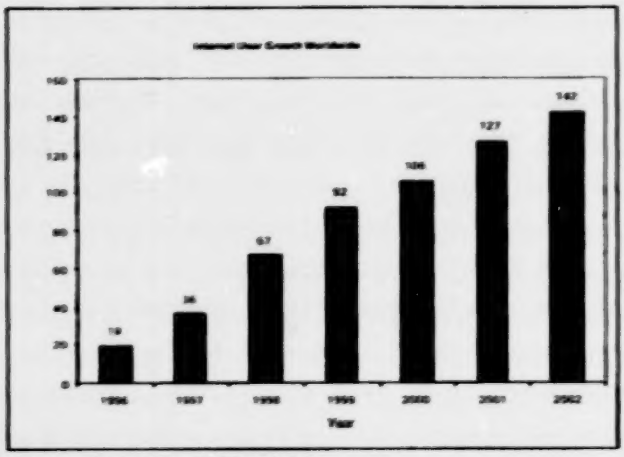

Figure 1. Internet User Growth Worldwide

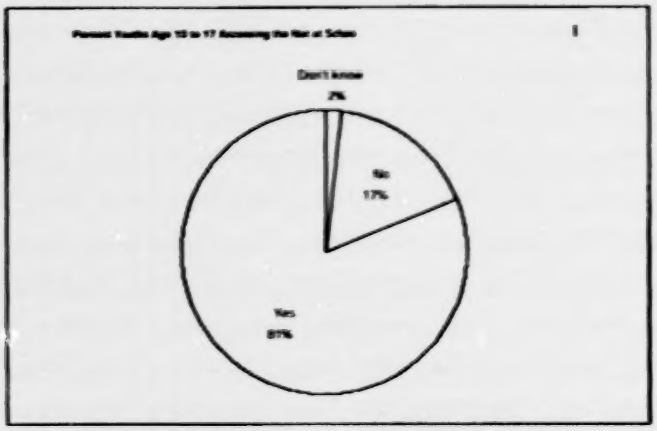

Figure 2. Percentage of Youths Between Ages 10-17 That Access the Internet at School

Using the Internet: Why It is Worth the Risk

There are numerous benefits of using the Internet in the classroom, which would otherwise have been impossible a decade ago. First, the Internet can expand students' access to resources dramatically by making resources from all over the world for them. Second, students can communicate with other students around the world via e-mail, chat, and instant messaging. Communicating each other, sharing information, exchanging ideas and cultures may improve collaborative learning (Newby, Stepic, Lehman, Russell, 1999). Third, students can access graphics, text, data, articles, papers, electronic books, and video and audio clips that enhance their reading, analyzing, evaluating, and higher-order thinking skills. Also, as an educational tool, the Internet allows students to navigate virtually museums, libraries, and places. Finally, students can publish their knowledge and work on the Internet, which is easier and cheaper than other traditional ways of sharing knowledge and cultural values.

How Can the Internet Be Used in Classroom Settings?

There are a big number of ways of using the Internet as a learning and activity tool with which students and teachers may engage for learning and sharing knowledge. People who study in the areas of education and teaching; the Internet is an ideal resource, because text and graphic based communication systems are expanded and evolved into powerful multimedia communications today (Shelly, Cahsman, Gunter, 1999). The Internet and the World

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Wide Web are by providing a variety of learning tools changing the way teachers instruct and the way students learn basic skills and subjects.

There are several ways to use the Internet in the classroom. First, the Internet can be used as a research tool for projects. Students can easily access a wide range of literature on any topic. Second, it can be used for reinforcing topics already covered in class, for example, for expanding the multicultural aspect of the classroom and as a supplementary tool for curriculum or online reading in classroom. Third, the teacher may keep in contact with students and other teachers around the world. The Internet can also be used for practical applications of theories.

What Risks are Involved with Using the Internet in the Classroom?

The Internet is a mirror of the society it is being used by. Currently, web publishing is not controlled by any particular organization and there are no regulations in place to verify the information posted. Although the Internet is a comprehensive information resource and a useful teaching and learning tool for education, there are some areas of the Internet that are not appropriate for a young audience. There are sites that depict nonconsensual act of violence, explicit sexual sites or promote racism, anti-Semitism, and hatred (Magid, 2000). Another risk is that, while online a student may provide information or arrange an encounter that could risk his/her safety or safety of other persons (Magid, 1998). Students have been known occasionally to provide personal identifying information to strangers -either knowingly or not-such as password, home, or school address, phone number that could endanger their mental and physical condition. Also some information, graphics, and video and audio clips acquired from the Internet may not always be accurate and appropriate. Additionally, the Internet can be used as a device with which to play or spend time off task. It is also viable to break numerous laws including "computer hacking" and copyright violation. Educators should preview materials and provide supervision for ensuring children's safe use of the Internet. These strategies and approaches can be different in different circumstances depending on the audience's age, knowledge, and cultural background. Indeed, violence, pornography, and predators on the Web are more serious threats to children's exposure than other threats.

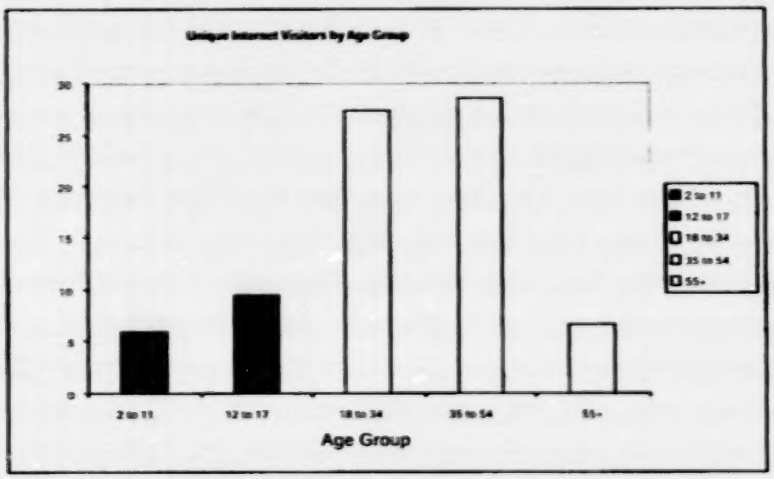

Figure 3. Unique Internet Visitors by Age Group

A recent survey certainly indicates that kids are fueling the Internet explosion. Polling firm Grunwald Associates found in their just-released study that 25 million 2 to17-year-olds are online in the US right now, up from 8 million in 1997.

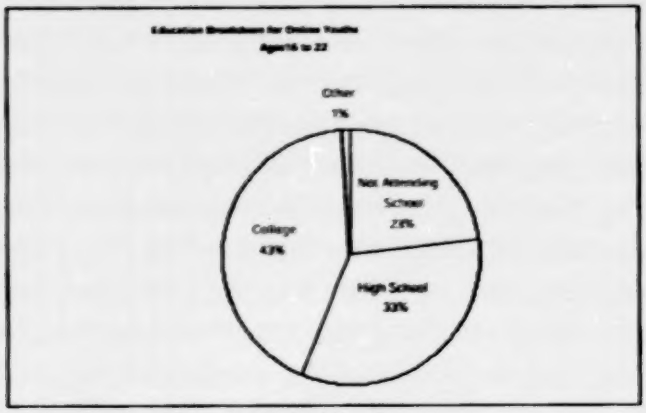

Figure 4. Education Breakdown for Online Youths

About one in five 10 to 17-year-olds surveyed said they have received sexual solicitation or approach via the Internet in the past year, according to a study released this week by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). Another key finding was that one in four of the children surveyed said they've had unwanted exposure to pictures of naked people or people having sex in the past year, The study "Online Victimization" available online at www.netfamilynews.org is an important contribution to the public discourse about the Internet's impact on kids. It calls for "private and public initiatives to raise awareness and provide solutions," including strategies that reduce the amount of offensive behavior toward kids, help shield parents and teachers from it, and give them the tools they need to cope with both the behavior and its consequences. According to the study large numbers of youths encounter offensive experiences on the Internet. Twenty percent were sexually solicited, 6%were harassed. The offenses and offenders are diverse, not just men trolling for sex. Much of the offensive behavior comes from other youth, and some from women as well. Teenagers are the primary targets, creating a different sort of challenge than would be the case if younger children, over whom parents have more control, were the primary targets. Although most solicitations fail, the sheer numbers are alarming. Several million young people, ages 10 to 17, are sexually propositioned on the Internet every year (Dede, 2001).

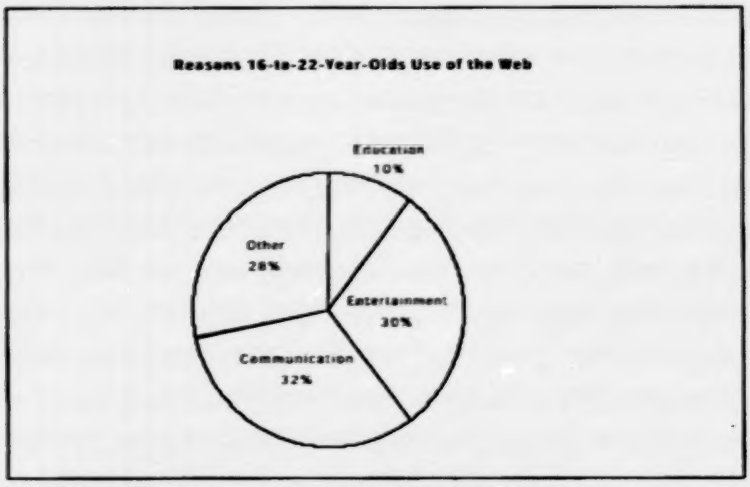

Figure 5. 16-22 Year-olds' Reasons to use the World Wide Web

Safety Issues in The Classroom: What teachers should do

This paper focuses mainly on the safety strategies for 6-12 grade level at schools, because they are thought to be the most affected persons by harms of the Internet. At these grades students are just beginning their move

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toward independence and can no longer be told not to do something without being given a well-argued reason for the rule. At these ages, students need guidelines and assistance with their decision-making. They also need clear guidance for appropriate uses of the Internet, while given information to understand the reasons behind the enforced directions. Careful preparation is the key to effective and safe use of the Internet in the classroom.

Preparing Students

In order for them to be completely prepared for navigating the Internet safely in the classroom, students need to learn what defines ethical behavior on the Internet. Essentially ethical behavior on the Internet is the same as ethical behavior in every other aspect of life. Students need to know that they should never menace or harass people they meet online or offline. They also need to know that they should not use language that is offensive to others. A good general rule that the students can fallow is "Don't say anything to people you meet online that you would not say to your parents, teachers, friend, or religious leader".

Teacher preparation

Students need the teacher's support and involvement in learning how to make positive choices. Teaching involves helping students to cope with problems encountered online and providing them with the set of skills, they will need to make the right choices in the absence of their teacher or parent.

There are several ways teachers can prepare themselves and students while surfing online. First, before starting to use the Internet, teachers may give a short lecture about how to use the Internet browser software. Second, to teach ethical behavior on the Internet the teacher may open a discussion about the issue. Opening a discussion, they enable students to think critically about issues as the teacher guides them toward a better understanding. Teachers can also have the students role-play different situations on the Internet or can use examples to help students to come to a better understanding of the issues. Students should be informed of the Internet use policy including the rules of computer use and Internet access. The teacher must make sure that the students have read and signed the Internet Use Policy. Making clear what the penalties are for misusing of the Internet may reinforce students to use the Internet in a proper way. Teachers must also forward the policy to the parents. It is very important to keep parents informed about the activities that the students are involved in the classroom. Sending a newsletter and the Internet and computer use policy, and requiring students to return signed parental forms prior to each semester are some suggestions for teachers. They can also provide a computer workshop for parents prior to each semester in order to allow parents to review both the hardware and software their children will be using. Teachers make their phone number and e-mail address available to all parents to give the parents the ability to contact the teacher with any questions they may have.

Another preparation strategy for teachers is to provide a list of web site addresses that will be used in the class prior to classroom use. Students must be monitored while they are surfing on the Internet. Also filtering or blocking software can be used in the classroom computers to protect students. However, filtering software is practically not often capable of filtering out sites that contain unwanted materials for students. Also sometimes a valid content may be screened out inappropriately. Thus they are not to be relied on completely instead they should be supplemented with other strategies. It is a good idea to make sure computer screens can easily be seen by the teacher in the classroom (Magid, 2000). During an Internet lesson, teachers may roam the classroom observing what students are viewing. Most browsers keep in their history a number of short-term records of the recently visited sites. There are also monitoring systems that provide a record of the web sites a person has visited on the Internet. The monitoring systems and browsers' short-term records are low cost solutions for teachers to monitor their student in the classroom (Dede, 2001). Lacking the awareness of dangers the Internet can pose students unintentionally wonder places where their innocence and safety are compromised.

Safety Rules and Guidelines for Student Classroom Internet Use: What Students Need to Know

The use of school computers and computer networks, computer software, data files, Internet access, and intellectual property in the classroom is a privilege and is intended for educational purposes only.

The following list contains guidelines by according to which students should use the Internet during both their usual class hours and any time they may spend on the school's computers. This list is not meant to be a final list of what is or is not acceptable while using the Internet in class; however it provides some insightful ideas. If students are not sure about how to behave in a certain case they should ask their teacher. The set of rules students should obey in class include but are not limited to:

- Share computer account usernames or and passwords except when authorized.
- Create, copy, receive, or use data, language, or graphics which are obscene, abusive, or otherwise inappropriate at school
- Access, change, or delete computer programs, data files or electronic mail belonging to others without permission.
- Steal or destroy school computer hardware or peripherals.
- Steal or destroy computer software or data files owned by the school or others.
- Violate or attempt to violate the security of computer network systems.
- Take unauthorized actions, which deny access to, disrupt, or destroy the service of the computer network system.
- Make unauthorized or unlawful installation of personal computer software on the school computers or networks. Including, but not limited to games, virus programs, and applications software. Student provided software must be used only in accordance with the license.
- Use computers, networks, or peripherals to create a forged instrument.
- Use computers, networks, software, data files, or intellectual property in any unauthorized way.

(This list of classroom rules was adopted from "School Board of Alachua: County District Technology Plan" Available on-line at http://www.sbac.edu/district/techplan.html#anchor16496056, p.12.)

Computer Use Policy in the Classroom

- Computers should only be used for school related, educational activities.
- Chat rooms and Newsgroups may not be accessed.
- Purchases over the Internet are not permitted.
- Student cannot give out information about himself/herself such as personal phone numbers, address, passwords, last and first name, and other identifying information.
- Students cannot send a picture over the Internet or through regular e-mail to anyone without the teacher's permission.
- Student cannot respond to any messages that are mean or in any way make him/her feel uncomfortable.
- Student must tell his/her teacher; if something seems confusing, scary, or threatening online.
- Student cannot have a face-to face meeting with someone he/she has met online.
- Students and teachers will be required to log-in and log-out on the Internet.

(Adopted from "Hidden Oak Elementary School Gainesville, FL" computer use policy form.)

Conclusion

Most educators try to integrate technology and the Internet into classes to enhance students' learning and achievement. Although the Internet is an invaluable resource and a comprehensive research tool, it includes potential dangers and unsafe places as well. The speedy growing use of the Internet in the classroom by students has caused teachers to be increasingly concerned about students' safety using the Internet. The best way to assure that students are having fruitful online experiences is to monitor what they are doing. Teachers should spend time with students while they are online. The next step is to establish some basic rules for students' use of the Internet. While students need a certain amount of privacy, they also need guidance and supervision in their lives. By taking responsibility for students' use of the Internet, teachers can greatly minimize any potential risks of being online.

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